

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING

A letter from Mrs. Madison in relation to the publication of Mr. Madison's Notes of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention of 1787.

DECEMBER 8, 1836.

Read, and referred to the Committee on the Library.

WASHINGTON, December 6, 1836.

To the Senate and House of Representatives :

I transmit herewith to Congress copies of my correspondence with Mrs. Madison, produced by the resolution adopted at the last session by the Senate and House of Representatives, on the decease of her venerated husband. The occasion seems to be appropriate to present a letter from her on the subject of the publication of a work of great political interest and ability, carefully prepared by Mr. Madison's own hand, under circumstances that give it claims to be considered as little less than official.

Congress has already, at considerable expense, published, in a variety of forms, the naked journals of the Revolutionary Congress, and of the Convention that formed the constitution of the United States. I am persuaded that the work of Mr. Madison, considering the author, the subject-matter of it, and the circumstances under which it was prepared—long withheld from the public, as it has been, by those motives of personal kindness and delicacy that gave tone to his intercourse with his fellow-men, until he and all who had been participators with him in the scenes he describes have passed away—well deserves to become the property of the nation, and cannot fail, if published and disseminated at the public charge, to confer the most important of all benefits on the present and all succeeding generations, accurate knowledge of the principles of their Government, and the circumstances under which they were recommended and embodied in the constitution, for adoption.

ANDREW JACKSON.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,

July 9, 1836.

The Secretary of State has the honor to report to the President, that there is no resolution of Congress on the death of Mr. Madison on file in the Department of State. By application at the offices of the Secretary of the Senate and Clerk of the House of Representatives, the enclosed certified copy of a set of resolutions has been procured. These resolutions being joint, should have been enrolled, signed by the presiding officers of the two Houses, and submitted for the Executive approbation. By referring to the proceedings on the death of General Washington, such a course appears to have been thought requisite ; but in this case it has been deemed unnecessary, or has been omitted accidentally. The value of the public expression of sympathy would be so much diminished by postponement to the next session, that the Secretary has thought it best to present the papers, incomplete as they are, as the basis of such a letter as the President may think proper to direct to Mrs. Madison.

JOHN FORSYTH,

Secretary of State.

WASHINGTON, July 9, 1836.

MADAM : It appearing to have been the intention of Congress to make me the organ of assuring you of the profound respect entertained by both its branches for your person and character, and of their sincere condolence in the late afflicting dispensation of Providence, which has at once deprived you of a beloved companion, and your country of one of its most valued citizens ; I perform that duty, by transmitting the documents herewith enclosed.

No expression of my own sensibility at the loss sustained by yourself and the nation, could add to the consolation to be derived from these high evidences of the public sympathy. Be assured, madam, that there is not one of your countrymen who feels more poignantly the stroke which has fallen upon you, or who will cherish with a more endearing constancy the memory of the virtues, the services, and the purity of the illustrious man, whose glorious and patriotic life has been just terminated by a tranquil death.

I have the honor to be, madam,

Your most obedient servant,

ANDREW JACKSON.

To Mrs. D. P. MADISON,

Montpelier, Va.

MONTPELIER, August 20, 1836.

I received, sir, in due time, your letter, conveying to me the resolutions Congress were pleased to adopt on the occasion of the death of my beloved husband—a communication made the more grateful by the kind expression of your sympathy which it contained.

The high and just estimation of my husband by my countrymen and friends, and their generous participation in the sorrow occasioned by our

irretrievable loss, (expressed through their supreme authorities and otherwise,) are the only solace of which my heart is susceptible on the departure of him who had never lost sight of that consistency, symmetry, and beauty of character in all its parts, which secured to him the love and admiration of his country, and which must ever be the subject of peculiar and tender reverence to one whose happiness was derived from their daily and constant exercise.

The best return I can make for the sympathy of my country is, to fulfil the sacred trust his confidence reposed in me—that of placing before it and the world what his pen prepared for their use—a legacy, the importance of which is deeply impressed on my mind.

With great respect,

D. P. MADISON.

To the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

MONTPELIER, *November 15, 1836.*

SIR: The will of my late husband, James Madison, contains the following provision:

“Considering the peculiarity and magnitude of the occasion which produced the convention at Philadelphia in 1787, the characters who composed it, the constitution which resulted from their deliberations, its effects during a trial of so many years on the prosperity of the people living under it, and the interest it has inspired among the friends of free government, it is not an unreasonable inference that a careful and extended report of the proceedings and discussions of that body, which were with closed doors, by a member who was constant in his attendance, will be particularly gratifying to the people of the United States, and to all who take an interest in the progress of political science and the cause of true liberty.” This provision bears evidence of the value he set on his report of the Debates in the Convention, and he has charged legacies on them alone, to the amount of \$1,200, for the benefit of literary institutions and for benevolent purposes, leaving the residuary nett proceeds for the use of his widow.

In a paper written by him, and which it is proposed to annex as a preface to the Debates, he traces the formation of confederacies and of the articles of confederation; its defects which caused, and the steps which led to the convention; his reasons for taking the debates, and the manner in which he executed the task; and his opinion of the framers of the constitution. From this I extract his description of the manner in which they were taken, as it guaranties their fullness and accuracy: “In pursuance of the task I had assumed, I chose a seat in front of the presiding member, with the other members on my right and left hands. In this favorable position for hearing all that passed, I noted down, in terms legible, and in abbreviations and marks intelligible to myself, what was read to the chair or spoken by the members; and losing not a moment unnecessarily between the adjournment and re-assembling of the convention, I was enabled to write out my daily notes during the session, or within a few finishing days after its close, in the extent and form preserved in my own hand on my files.

“In the labor and correctness of this, I was not a little aided by practice, and by a familiarity with the style and the train of observation and reasoning which characterized the principal speakers. It happened also that I was

not absent a single day, nor more than the casual fraction of an hour in any day, so that I could not have lost a single speech, unless a very short one."

However prevailing the restraint which veiled, during the life of Mr. Madison, this record of the creation of our constitution, the grave, which has closed over all those who participated in its formation, has separated their acts from all that is personal to him or to them. His anxiety for their early publicity after this was removed, may be inferred from his having them transcribed and revised by himself; and, it may be added, the known wishes of his illustrious friend Thomas Jefferson, and other distinguished patriots, the important light they would shed for present as well as future usefulness, besides my desire to fulfil the pecuniary obligations imposed by his will, urged their appearance without awaiting the preparation of his other works; and early measures were accordingly adopted by me to ascertain from publishers, in various parts of the Union, the terms on which their publication could be effected.

It was also intended to publish, with these debates, those taken by him in the Congress of the confederation in 1782, '3, and '7, of which he was then a member, and selections made by himself, and prepared under his eye, from his letters narrating the proceedings of that body during the periods of his service in it, prefixing the debates in 1776 on the declaration of independence by Thomas Jefferson, so as to embody all the memorials in that shape known to exist. This exposé of the situation of the country under the confederation, and the defects of the old system of government, evidenced in the proceedings under it, seem to convey such preceding information as should accompany the debates on the formation of the constitution by which it was superseded.

The proposals which have been received, so far from corresponding with the expectations of Mr. Madison when he charged the first of these works with those legacies, have evidenced that their publication could not be engaged in by me, without advances of funds and involving of risks, which I am not in a situation to make or incur.

Under these circumstances, I have been induced to submit for your consideration whether the publication of these debates be a matter of sufficient interest to the people of the United States to deserve to be brought to the notice of Congress. And should such be the estimation of the utility of these works by the representatives of the nation, as to induce them to relieve me individually from the obstacles which impede it, their general circulation will be insured, and the people be remunerated by its more economical distribution among them.

With high respect and consideration,

D. P. MADISON.

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.